DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 546 EC 131 751

TITLE	Creating Positive Attitudes Among Non-Handicapped Students Toward Their Hanidcapped Peers: The Phoenix Conference (Phoenix, Arizona, February 27-29, 1980).
INSTITUTION	National Association for Retarded Citizens, Arlington, Tex. Research and Demonstration Inst.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	ARC-5M/7-80
PUB DATE	Feb 80
GRANT	G007901327
NOTE	42p.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Attitude Change; *Community Attitudes; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mainstreaming; Peer Acceptance; *Student Attitudes; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Proceedings of a conference to help educators and other professionals create positive student attitudes among nonhandicapped students toward handicapped students are summarized. Preliminary sessions focused on definitions of mainstreaming, public attitudes, barriers to attitudinal change, and ways to begin and maximize effective interaction in the classroom. Summaries of work group meetings touch on strategies affecting three basic problems (sample subtopics in parentheses): attitudes of school personnel (establishing an atmosphere of trust, structuring for success); attitudes of nonhandicapped students (breaking barriers, using media effectively); and attitudes in the community (medical and judicial personnel). (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED197546

EC131751

2

This document was prepared pursuant to Grant G007901327 with the U. S. Education Department, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Administration, Office of Special Education, Division of Personnel Preparation. Grantees undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express their judgment freely in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Department of Education position or policy.

A working conference hosted by the Association for Retarded Citizens National Research and Demonstration Institute, through a grant from the U. S. Education Department's Office of Special Education.

February 27-29, 1980
Phoenix, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

Largely as a result of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, a nationwide effort is now underway to integrate mentally retarded and other handicapped students into educational activities with their non-handicapped peers. In some instances, this means placing a handicapped pupil, such as a mildly retarded individual, into a regular classroom, with the option of receiving supplementary instruction provided by resource teachers and other specialists. Other handicapped children, such as the severely retarded, may receive their instruction in self-contained classrooms, but participate in non-academic activities such as lunch, field trips and physical education, with the non-handicapped.

By observing and interacting with regular class pupils, handicapped children can learn appropriate behaviors that will greatly assist them in living more productively in the mainstream of society. However, many parents, including those of mentally retarded persons, are concerned that their children may be subjected to ridicule and rejection if integrated into school programs with the non-handicapped. This is particularly true in the case of severely handicapped students.

The problem is compounded by the fact that many regular classroom teachers have had little training in the area of exceptional children, and only limited contact with such individuals. And, there is some evidence which suggests that these educators are less than enthusiastic at the prospect of working with handicapped students . . . .

A major challenge facing the American educational system is fostering understanding and acceptance of mentally retarded and other handicapped students among non-handicapped pupils. The purpose of the Phoenix Conference was to identify the most creative approaches to this problem, and suggest potential future directions. The group gathered to undertake this task included both regular and special education teachers, public school administrators, media professionals, judicial personnel, researchers, professionals concerned with the varying handicapping conditions and university teachers specializing in such areas as education, special education and educational psychology.

Participants gathered in preliminary sessions to hear presentations regarding different aspects of the problem, then began a series of work group meetings. These meetings embodied the basic goals of the conference. Designed along the "brainstorming, think-tank" approach to problem solving, their purpose was to develop a series of concrete strategies for changing attitudes toward handicapped students among three specific groups: school personnel, non-handicapped students and the general public.

The purpose of this document is to accurately reflect the problems and issues discussed by speakers and participants, and their specific recommendations for action.

Every Handicapped Child Has The Right To:

- A free public school education . . .
- Placement decisions based on informal and formal evaluations with input from the student's parents . . .
- Programming in the "least restrictive environment" possible for the individual . . .
- An individualized educational program appropriate to the student's needs . . .
- Periodic review of the appropriateness of the educational plan, with parental input . . .

A summary of some of the major requirements of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

THE PROBLEM

> "Teaching today is hard work — it was a lot more fun to be in the classroom ten years ago. I think if they give us one more thing to do it'll be the straw that broke the camel's back . . . ."

This is the way one teacher expressed the problem. Her words are her own, but they echo a general feeling among teachers all across the country. Certainly, the dilemma did not begin with Public Law 94-142. Ever-increasing workloads in the teaching profession are nothing new. However, teachers and other interested individuals are concerned that mainstreaming could indeed be that final straw. As the teachers themselves express it: "Mainstreaming is not just an extra responsibility — it's one we know next to nothing about."

Special education teachers voice similar concerns. How will mainstreaming affect them? What new roles will they be expected to play when handicapped children enter the regular classroom? Many parents of handicapped youngsters are extremely hesitant to subject their children to possible ridicule and rejection in the public schools. How will their mentally retarded child react to the presence of strangers who "can't possibly understand" his problems and needs? Will he regress under the strain of unfamiliar surroundings?

Principals, school board members, budget directors, attorneys, judges, social workers, psychologists and various other concerned individuals are looking for answers. And, at the heart of the issue, there is one particularly pressing question: How will non-handicapped students react to these newcomers — classmates who are, in many cases, decidedly "different" from themselves and their peers?

What is "Mainstreaming" Really All About?

Much of the concern about mainstreaming can be traced to a lack of understanding of the term, and what it truly means to the community. The Association for Retarded Citizens considers mainstreaming to be an educational service philosophy which can be implemented in a number of different ways — a principle that **provides a variety of classroom and instructional alternatives** appropriate to each student's individual educational needs. In the view of the ARC, this principle should allow maximal temporal, social and instructional interaction among mentally retarded and non-retarded students in the normal course of the school day. However, the Association does not consider integration per se as an educational goal. Rather, it feels this integration should be viewed as a means of facilitating the acquisition of social, academic and life skills needed by mentally retarded persons to live in a world populated by handicapped as well as non-handicapped persons.

The ARC feels that mainstreaming should be viewed as affecting **all** students and teachers in the public schools. It is an opportunity to offer a wide range of educational experiences which can benefit every student, regardless of his learning needs. Mainstreaming is not an "overnight" answer. It is a principle that must be implemented in carefully planned stages that encourage parental involvement, the development of teacher guidelines and responsibilities, the incorporation of inservice training, and thoughtful orientation of students to avoid unnecessary sensitization to individual differences.

Public Attitudes and Private Fears

Concerns about mainstreaming reflect a greater, far more serious issue. Studies of public attitudes toward handicapped persons show that the vast majority of the population is not at all certain that disabled individuals should be classified as "true members of society."

Dr. Philip Roos, National Executive Director of the Association for Retarded Citizens, noted that surveys indicate the presence of "pervasive negative stereotypes regarding mentally retarded persons," and the "lack of even a basic understanding regarding mental retardation."

Quoting a 1978 Gallup poll, Dr. Roos pointed to some alarming figures. Among persons questioned:

51% still thought mental retardation was a form of mental illness . . .

38% felt mental retardation was associated with criminality . . .

58% felt mental retardation was associated in some manner with sex crimes . . .

49% believed mentally retarded people were unable to support themselves . . .

27% believed mentally retarded persons should "be with their own kind" . . .

37% thought mentally retarded individuals should reside in "special hospitals" . . .

Other figures, based on a wide spectrum of studies compiled as late as 1970, suggest that the public in general has very negative expectations regarding the social competence of mentally retarded persons:

55% felt that mentally retarded persons make poor parents . . .

49% believed these individuals would make poor husbands or wives . . .

84% felt mentally retarded persons should not drink . . .

58% believed mentally retarded persons should not "go downtown alone" . . .

78% felt mentally retarded individuals should not be allowed to drive . . .

49% believed mentally retarded persons should not vote . . .

54% felt mentally retarded persons should not marry . . .

66% felt mentally retarded persons should not have families . . .

A 1975 study regarding degrees of social acceptibility placed mentally retarded persons nineteenth on a list of 21 disabilities. In a 1978 survey of one hundred landlords asked to rent to mentally retarded persons, only one consented to **meet** with the mentally retarded individual!

The public also feels mentally retarded persons have a poor employment potential. Thirty of 56 employers surveyed indicated that they would be unwilling to hire a mentally retarded person. Mental retardation ranked twelfth in a list of twenty disabilities regarding employability.

A 1977 effort to identify community group homes found that "negative community attitudes" ranked as the second most important barrier to establishing group homes and retaining mentally retarded persons outside of institutions.

These figures reflect public attitudes toward retarded persons. Studies regarding other disabilities suggest similar public feelings.

Barriers to Progress

Public law — if not the public conscience — says that handicapped persons **are** fellow human beings and fellow citizens entitled to full and equal rights. Yet, the "common sense, evidential" approach to improving public attitudes has not proven effective. Most media campaigns regarding

health-related issues fail to do the job. Instead, such efforts sometimes tend to **reinforce** existing negative attitudes. Moreover, there is a good deal of evidence that merely **exposing** the public to handicapped persons and the facts behind their disabilities neither changes their attitudes nor enhances their knowledge of the subject.

Dr. Roos told conference participants that "while we have made formidable advances toward enhancing both the lifestyles and developmental expectations of mentally retarded persons, we face an awesome challenge in **implementing** our positive ideologies . . . ."

Obviously, advances in the fields of mental retardation and other handicapping conditions are of limited value without strong public endorsement. Acceptance is a start, but acceptance alone is not enough. Only **active public support** will enable handicapped persons to realize their rights to the educational benefits, job opportunities and lifestyles enjoyed by their non-handicapped peers.

Dr. Roos felt that effective answers to the problem of public acceptance called for innovative and creative thinking. He suggested that conference participants "overcome built-in resistance to familiar obstacles," and added that "we must resist the temptation to prejudge or evaluate possible avenues to success." He also suggested that conflicting views and opinions would enhance the group's insight into the issue at hand.

Dr. Brian M. McCann, Director of the Association for Retarded Citizens National Research and Demonstration Institute, challenged participants to bring their best deductive and imaginative powers to bear on the problem. "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this issue. What we do here could influence the future of special education in this country . . . ."

Obstacles to Attitudinal Change

Dr. James S. Payne, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Virginia, noted some of the barriers to promoting an understanding of handicapped persons, and offered several strategies for overcoming those barriers.

"The problem we face is both formidable and long-standing. Legislation such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act encourages the transition of handicapped persons from institutions to community settings. Yet, many people are less than delighted to welcome these fellow citizens into their neighborhoods. Some are openly scared to death of them. Inherent in our efforts to change attitudes toward the handicapped is the very real possibility of a public backlash that could seriously hamper our cause. Our strategies for change **must** be based on a thorough understanding of the ways in which people **positively accept** efforts to reach, and influence, their feelings . . . ."

Dr. Payne pointed to the media as an awesome shaper of both positive and negative concepts. "The media has us coming and going. In addition to forming public attitudes about the handicapped, many presentations **reinforce** those misconceptions already present in the minds of the public."

He noted that motion pictures such as the James Bond series often portray handicapped persons in a less than positive light. Villains are frequently disabled individuals with artificial hands or jaws which serve as destructive weapons. In the world of cartoons, there is the visually impaired "laughable Mr. Magoo," and the stuttering Elmer Fudd.

On the other side of the coin are handicapped persons with beneficent "super powers": Longstreet, the blind private investigator, and Ironsides, the paralyzed policeman. There are bionic men, bionic women — and even bionic dogs.

The character of Ironsides manages to portray both "super powers" and "super disabilities" simultaneously. There is a clear implication in the series that while Ironsides had a normal sex life before he was confined to a wheelchair, he does not enjoy that activity now. Such a portrayal reinforces the widely held public belief that people in wheelchairs — or indeed, people with **any** handicapping condition — have almost no sex drive. (Except for mentally retarded individuals, whose condition is thought by a large segment of the public to impel them toward "sexually aberrant activities.")

Conversely, handicapped people are sometimes pictured as being "sexy" **because** of their disabilities. The implication in the famous Hathaway shirt ads is that blindness in one eye is a condition that entails wealth, position, dignity and sexual attraction.

"Some people might feel such criticisms of the media are of little importance, and have little bearing on the image of handicapped persons," stated Dr. Payne. "Surely, super villains won't turn the public against disabled people. And, wouldn't handicapped super heroes serve to **enhance** the image of these individuals?" Dr. Payne sees the problem in a different light.

Taken separately, such portrayals may seem insignificant. Cumulatively, however — adding the centuries of misconceptions that came before contemporary media presentations — such characterizations merely reinforce the public's view of the handicapped person as being "different." Villain or hero, people with disabilities are "not like us." And, being different has seldom endeared an individual to his peers. Studies indicate that the adult population is already convinced handicapped persons do not share even the most basic human characteristics. How, then, are their children being affected? The continual flow of negative portrayals on both the small and giant screens is reinforced daily by their parents . . . .

If the media can influence the public through negative characterizations of the handicapped, it stands to reason that it can also very effectively

create positive attitudes. "Attitudes **can** be changed," noted Dr. Payne. "We **must** take a lesson from the people whose business is the forming of opinions. And we must learn the very real difference between merely **presenting** our message, and **selling** it to the public."

The use of the media to change public attitudes played an important role in every conference work group session. Recommendations and suggestions in this area are covered in the individual group reports included in this document.

Attitudes in the Classroom

Dr. David W. Johnson, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota, presented an overview of the current attitudes of non-handicapped students toward their handicapped peers, and offered possible models for increasing understanding between these two groups.

"Facing the facts head on," said Dr. Johnson, "we must recognize that students perceived as handicapped are often generally disliked, or seen in a negative manner. Moreover, familiarity does not necessarily breed acceptance — even after a handicapped child has become a part of the classroom scene he may still be shunned by his peers. Even when a handicapped child does **not** exhibit unusual behavior, he may still be disliked . . . ."

Sometimes direct interaction between students helps clear the air. At other times interaction has just the opposite effect. Clearly, there is ambivalence, uncertainty, discomfort, fear and anxiety among both handicapped and non-handicapped students in the classroom.

Given the background of these two "opposing forces," it is not surprising that such attitudes exist. Non-handicapped children come equipped with built-in fears and prejudices about being "different." They are already keenly aware of the fact that "there's safety in numbers," and that it is always best to "go with the group." On the other hand, handicapped children are used to being "outsiders." They are often aware of the fact that they are different, and many may find this new rejection in a class full of strangers merely another affirmation of an old familiar pattern.

As Dr. Johnson pointed out, a child doesn't have to be "extremely" different to receive the "outsider" label from his peers. Unfortunately, many persons with minor disabilities have social backgrounds which severely limit their ability to achieve acceptance. Dr. Johnson noted a case concerning an 18-year-old deaf girl raised in a rural area. While her handicap was neither physically evident nor severely debilitating in itself, this young woman had practically no experience in the normal areas of socialization. She did not know what to wear, how to behave, how to handle money, go to town or use public transportation. She had never gone on a date, and had

been taught to fear the opposite sex. After shifting continuously from the farm to the public schools to schools for the deaf and back again — she faced a dismal future of group homes and sheltered workshops.

To be a true member of society, a handicapped child **must** have positive peer group contact. And, even if the child has an opportunity to "catch up" later, it is difficult to ever establish the self-confidence that most non-handicapped children enjoy as a matter of course.

There is increasing evidence that peer group interaction may be the single most important ingredient in the area of social development. Peer relationships are vital in developing attitudes and values in terms of future psychological health, social skills and social competency. Children seem to learn how to control and master their aggressive impulses much more effectively through peer group interaction than through adult-child relationships. Sexual identity, the ability to see other people's points of view, and educational aspirations and achievements are all important aspects of peer group development. Conversely, studies indicate that isolation or rejection from peer groups sets the stage for destructive consequences.

A Beginning

How does a teacher begin effective interaction in the classroom? Dr. Johnson suggested building a more favorable impression of handicapped children by encouraging non-handicapped students to see the "whole individual, rather than the handicap." This approach cuts to the heart of the problem, since the non-handicapped child sees the disability itself as the most obviously "different" characteristic of his handicapped peer. There is a tendency among non-handicapped students to view the handicapped child as a symbol — a disability with a person attached. Thus, consideration of the whole person — one with a characteristic that is **not** the most important aspect of that person — helps children learn to differentiate between the symbol and the individual.

What happens when handicapped and non-handicapped students first begin to interact? Sometimes, non-handicapped students are initially overly friendly, then later reject the handicapped child. When handicapped children accomplish something in the classroom, their peers often overreact and applaud their achievements as "super good." On the other hand, when the handicapped student does something that may be only moderately disconcerting, the peer group views his actions as "terrible behavior." This amplification of the "good and the bad" indicates a great deal of mixed emotions on the part of the non-handicapped student. He wants to do the right thing — but is not at all sure how to do it. Further, he does not always follow positive expressions with positive actions. Many non-handicapped students will state openly that they "have nothing

against a handicapped child." However, the child in question does not get invited to birthday parties, sports activities and other social gatherings.

Dr. Johnson suggested that the manner in which a teacher structures interaction is one of the determining factors in whether or not the process succeeds. He stated that cooperative learning situations provide one answer to the problem — putting children together in situations where they must work together to achieve a common goal.

"Putting children together in a sink-or-swim situation tends to promote interaction. The process of helping and sharing creates feelings of belonging, support and acceptance — a condition of psychological safety for all members of the group . . . ."

According to Dr. Johnson, these situations foster equality and lead to friendships, positive attitudes and higher self-esteem for all concerned. More importantly, they reinforce expectations that future interaction will be constructive.

Cooperative learning situations appear to have a number of advantages over more traditional educational methods. Competitive learning fosters comparative value judgments. "Work by yourself and see who's best." There are always winners, and always losers. Winners are accepted, losers are rejected. And losers — handicapped or non-handicapped — feel alone, alienated and abandoned. They have proven the lesson of history: Society punishes those who can't compete.

The individualistic approach to learning, another classroom alternative, sets up a more subtle competitive structure. Those who succeed at their own pace are keenly aware of those who fail. And the handicapped child — who felt abandoned already — is now certain he is alone in the classroom.

Some positive findings concerning cooperative learning situations show that handicapped children who have been a part of such a group tend to get chosen as partners again — in spite of their shortcomings as major contributing members of the team. Given the chance to know and work with handicapped children, their non-handicapped peers discover positive characteristics such as "a good sense of humor," and "a lot of help in getting us going." They have begun to learn that the individual is indeed more than his disability . . . .

Maximizing Interaction

Dr. Roger Johnson, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Minnesota and brother of Dr. David Johnson, pointed out some of the further benefits of cooperative learning groups, and the various ways in which teachers and students could make such groups work effectively.

"In one study we made, 87% of the persons interviewed said school is a competitive enterprise. This is the kind of environment that is predominant in the American educational system . . . ."

Dr. Johnson stated that both the individualistic and competitive approaches to learning have tended to further separate students from each other, and have done little to foster positive interdependence.

"Heterogeneous cooperative learning groups bring students together in spite of their differences. In fact, in such a setting, **being** different helps. New, divergent viewpoints enable students to grasp problems more effectively, and find answers they might not have been able to come up with by themselves. Thus, differences are not only accepted, they are appreciated. When differences add power to the group, stereotyped prejudices tend to decrease rapidly."

Dr. Johnson noted that while such persons as severely and profoundly retarded persons are limited in their abilities, "we must not draw lines that exclude them. Rather, we must see how far we can go to extend participation to as many handicapped persons as possible."

As mentioned, even handicapped students who do not contribute to the same degree as their non-handicapped peers are often chosen again to work with the group. For example, a student who is poor in math might be chosen over one who is good in that subject because "I like to work with her," or "she watches the clock and keeps us on time," or "she has the same hobby I do . . . ."

"There are ways to include members who may not be able to contribute greatly to the group," notes Dr. Johnson. "Sometimes we can alter the criteria of the problem somewhat to include the handicapped child. We can also measure his success by the standards of his individual abilities. In other words, if getting one part of the group problem right is an accomplishment for **him,** then he has reached his particular goal."

How many children make an effective group? Dr. Johnson suggested that while larger groups offered a greater chance of getting expertise on the team, it takes a great deal more skill to operate such a group. Three students, he suggests, seem to make an ideal cooperative team.

WORK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

I. Attitudes of School Personnel

In work group sessions on this topic, participants sought to identify innovative strategies for creating positive attitudes among school personnel toward handicapped students. They did not limit their thinking to classroom teachers, but considered the broad spectrum of school employees who come into contact with the student body. Participants were keenly aware of the fact that establishing a climate of understanding among school personnel was a prerequisite to fostering positive attitudes among regular classroom students themselves.

When new plans and ideas are disseminated, teachers, school administrative personnel and other members of the educational team often find themselves at the bottom of the list — if, indeed, they are on the list at all. It is sometimes assumed that these individuals automatically know "what needs to be done" — that they can routinely handle whatever tasks are thrust upon them. Somehow, teachers are supposed to **know** these things — even if they are totally unfamiliar with the subject at hand.

Thus, advocates of integrative learning discover that many teachers are openly opposed to admitting handicapped students to the classroom. They find school administrators hesitant to discuss the issue, and educational personnel all along the line doing little to foster integration. These attitudes do not necessarily reflect opposition to mainstreaming. Most likely,

they point to a lack of understanding of the broad variety of classroom and instructional alternatives available within this educational principle.

Conference participants felt that advocates of the handicapped must make a major effort to work closely with educational personnel. They pointed out that teachers cannot be expected to take an active, enthusiastic part in integrative learning programs without a thorough knowledge of the subject themselves. And, certainly, positive attitudes among school personnel are prerequisite to the attainment of like attitudes among non-handicapped students.

What can be done to help school personnel understand the needs of handicapped students? How can we turn a potentially disruptive change into an orderly transition that will ultimately benefit both the handicapped and non-handicapped student?

Teacher Interdependence

Conferees emphasized the importance of utilizing and strengthening the existing professional ties between regular and special education teachers. A sound, interdependent relationship between these groups will go a long way toward instilling positive attitudes among students and reinforcing integrative learning programs. In the past, many special education teachers and regular classroom teachers have viewed their roles as separate and distinct within the educational system. Every effort should be made to bring about a closer relationship between the two. Working together, the special skills of each can enhance the learning experiences of both handicapped and non-handicapped students.

Particular emphasis on teacher interdependence should be developed on the elementary school level, where children's attitudes are in the formative stage. Foundations of understanding and acceptance developed here would go a long way toward enhancing positive attitudes in future years. Due to the age level of these students, elementary school teachers have a more flexible curriculum, and are thus more open and amenable to mainstreaming approaches.

It was suggested that teacher training models be designed to provide support personnel such as helping teachers, diagnosticians and supervisory teachers with the necessary skills to aid their peers in the regular school system. These models would include training in diagnosing the needs of regular classroom teachers, and evaluating their understanding of integrative education programs. Work in this area should proceed at several levels simultaneously, but specific emphasis should be placed on helping regular classroom teachers in public high schools. It was felt that high school students offer the greatest potential for quickly establishing positive attitudes toward handicapped persons. While such students have

already formed opinions on a number of social issues, they are especially receptive to new ideas and concepts. Some, because of their experience in physical education or vocational education programs, would be particularly helpful in promoting positive attitudes. Handicapped persons such as the mentally retarded might initially relate more readily to these activities than to regular instructional areas. Peer acceptance in these classes would help reinforce positive attitudes among the student body.

Successful training models for helping teachers in public schools could be further developed as video cassette programs designed for distribution on a national basis. Similar programs could be produced for both local and national use on subjects such as the orientation of new school personnel, the development of pre-service skills and familiarization programs for school administrators. Many national organizations such as the Staff Development Council and the National Inservice Network have established effective communication links with their members. Training models and orientation programs could be presented at the national meetings of such organizations for dissemination through their membership.

Establishing an Atmosphere of Trust

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of establishing and maintaining a favorable climate of trust and understanding between school staff members, parents, advocates of handicapped citizens, non-handicapped students and handicapped students themselves. New ideas, unfamiliar concepts and the threat of burdensome responsibilities **can** lead to an atmosphere of discord and mistrust. As in all such endeavors, cooperation is the keynote. Educational personnel, parents and other interested persons must realize they are all working toward a common, worthwhile goal. Conference participants contributed a number of suggestions in this area:

- Parents of handicapped children have a wealth of experience to share with school personnel and parents of non-handicapped children. Such interaction tends to erode misconceptions and differences, and emphasizes the commonality of goals.
- It is important to establish effective lines of communication between school personnel and non-handicapped students. A good relationship between teachers and students can lead to the recruitment of non-handicapped pupils as student advocates for handicapped peers. These advocates can aid the family of a handicapped child through home visits, accompanying the child to social and athletic events, or helping feed a severely retarded child.

- Siblings of handicapped children can provide valuable insights for teachers and non-handicapped students. Certainly, care should be exercised in selecting children for this job, as many siblings of handicapped persons are already highly stressed. Participants in such projects should be chosen on a volunteer basis.
- School staff members such as principals, secretaries, janitors, bus drivers and others would gain a better understanding of handicapped students through participation in an inservice "personal commitment" project. Individual staff members could be assigned to a single handicapped student, or a small group of students, over a specified period of time. Through continual periodic contact, the staff member would not only increase his or her understanding of the handicapped person, but could aid the school in evaluating and monitoring the student's progress. Conferees felt individual educational programming such as this would be greatly beneficial to all concerned.

Structuring for Success

There is no tried and true formula for successfully mainstreaming handicapped children into the public school system. Indeed, a rigid "step-by-step" method is not called for in this sort of undertaking. "Play it by ear," suggests a teacher who has seen mainstreaming work in her own school. "Remember that you're dealing with people, and people's feelings. Nobody ever forced another person to genuinely change their attitude. But the change **does** take place. It takes place right before your eyes if you just give it the chance to happen . . . ."

Through this teacher's experience, and others, conference participants gained a valuable insight into the process of mainstreaming. In the end, casting professional jargon aside, integrating one group with another is a matter of "letting the unfamiliar become the familiar." The more natural the setting, the easier the process becomes. The teacher, of course, is the key to this transformation. Students very quickly sense, and reflect, the attitudes of their teacher toward handicapped members of the class. For example: If the teacher treats the introduction of a handicapped child into the classroom as an "unusual event," the class will very likely assume that they, too, should react in this manner. Thus, the teacher could set the stage for viewing the newcomer as "different."

Assuredly, it is no easy task to bring handicapped students into a non-handicapped environment. It is difficult for handicapped and non-handicapped children alike. But the transition can be eased considerably

by the teacher's positive attitude toward the situation. Conferees did not suggest that teachers merely "mix 'em up and let things happen." Rather, they felt that a "planned, flexible, low-key format" would produce the most satisfactory results.

"I let my students know when **any** new pupil is coming into the class," said one teacher who has seen mainstreaming work. "I do the same thing for handicapped students. Sometimes, I add the statement that 'Mary has a problem that will make some of her studies difficult.' There's a fine line between pointing out a particular difference, and painting the student himself as **being** different. It's not a good idea to avoid honest answers with children, or to give them the basis for drawing misconceptions of their own . . . ."

The New Classroom

Conference participants offered several suggestions that might prove helpful in creating a positive learning climate for handicapped and non-handicapped students:

- The general curriculum should include areas devoted to fostering social adjustment, life preparation and related activities that include handicapped children.
- School materials, programs and settings within the integrated classroom will focus primarily on the chronological age of the class in question. For example: It is likely that a 16-year-old mildly retarded student would be far more interested in a story dealing with teenage activities, than one of the "See Jane Run" variety. While such students will most likely receive special help from both students and teachers, their overall environment should reflect the age level of the class itself. Even severely retarded children benefit from taking part in daily activities of the class and interacting with their non-handicapped peers.
- A general understanding of the individual differences between students should be incorporated into the curriculum. Conferees viewed the open discussion of race, creed, color and handicapping conditions as beneficial in establishing positive attitudes within the classroom.
- While it is important to structure classroom activities to further social interaction, teachers should recognize that some individual children might prefer a certain degree of isolation. They should be given the opportunity to participate, and the right to decline.
- Many teachers fail to support integrative learning because they are not aware of the broader nature of the program. They feel that handicapped persons **will** be integrated into the classroom — period. Advocates of handicapped children should help them understand that mainstreaming

is **not** a program without alternatives. For instance, there are at least three distinct levels of participation that might be offered a handicapped student: (1) physical presence in the classroom; (2) social presence; and (3) instructional presence. Some students may be capable of participating in only the first of these options. Others will be able to take part in all three, to varying degrees. Handicapped students are no closer to fitting standard molds than are their non-handicapped peers.

- It is important to recognize both the differences and the commonalities within a particular classroom. Teachers should understand that while they will sometimes be dealing with serious cognitive problems in the mainstreamed school, those problems are extensions of the basic learning process and not a separate issue. Special education teachers and other professionals familiar with the learning difficulties of the handicapped should help regular classroom teachers understand that **all** handicapped members of their class are capable of some degree of cognition. The realization that handicapped persons share this commonality with their non-handicapped peers is a basic step toward establishing a positive classroom attitude.

II. Attitudes of Non-Handicapped Students

Work group sessions on this subject focused on creative approaches to achieving positive attitudes toward handicapped students on the part of their non-handicapped peers. Conferees considered direct methods of gaining understanding within this group, and ways in which the teacher might structure or "orchestrate" classroom activities toward this goal.

Conference participants felt that the key to successful interaction between handicapped and non-handicapped students is an understanding of the broad principles which govern the interaction of any two groups. Every experienced teacher knows there are both commonalities and differences among her students. Even the most advanced class of "super bright" pupils offers a wide spectrum of variations. There is a fastest learner and a slowest learner. There is the "prettiest" child and the "ugliest" child. There is a popular, aggressive leader and a solitary outsider. Moreover, there is a wide array of economic, social, physical and emotional characteristics — all working together in a single classroom.

If there were no commonalities in such a group, teaching would be a near impossible task. Fortunately, students are young human beings and are endowed with the human trait of seeking out similarities. In a normal social setting the similarities between individuals tend to offset the differences. Can a similar situation be fostered in the mainstreamed classroom? The analogy, of course, is far from perfect. There are fewer commonalities and greater differences in such a setting. When the severely handicapped are involved, the problem of discovering and nurturing similarities and resolving obvious differences is multiplied manyfold. Still, the principles of social interaction are sound, and conference participants felt they offered a worthwhile path toward understanding.

Effective Support Personnel

Participants recommended the recruitment of various individuals and groups who could nurture positive attitudes among non-handicapped children. Parents of handicapped children can relate valuable home experiences to school personnel. In turn, these parents can gain a better understanding of their children's role in the classroom. Principles stressed earlier in the section on changing the attitudes of school personnel are also useful here: non-handicapped students serving as advocates for their handicapped peers, the use of handicapped students themselves and the recruitment of siblings of handicapped students — on a voluntary basis.

The school should identify and recruit advocates from student groups that already influence a number of other students — The National Honor Society, Future Teachers of America and various vocational groups could be included in recruitment efforts. After-school groups are equally important, for they offer the valuable qualities of social interaction. The Boy Scouts of America, Indian Guides, Girl Scouts of America, Little League teams, 4-H Clubs and various church-affiliated and religious groups are only a few possible choices. Any student who displays school leadership in a positive direction should be considered as a potential recruit.

Peer tutoring between handicapped and non-handicapped students in subjects such as driver training offers the dual benefits of learning and socialization. Moreover, students who can drive can further these goals by helping transport handicapped students to and from school, or to social and athletic events.

Positive Interaction

An ideal — and practical — model of positive interaction is one in which small successes form the foundation for larger victories. Every teacher knows his or her class better than any other individual. How fast can we advance toward understanding? Which handicapped and non-handicapped students are forming worthwhile relationships? Which ones are **not**?

The cooperative interdependent models suggested by Drs. David and Roger Johnson in our introduction appear to form the basis for one sound approach to forming attitudinal change and mutual understanding. While the structure and direction of the model is guided by the teacher, the process is designed to grow at a natural pace. Progress can be measured, and new ideas brought into play when the class is ready for them. Again — larger victories built on small successes.

Accentuate the accomplishments and talents of handicapped students, and call particular attention to the role such students play as members of cooperative groups. Stress the commonality of mainstreamed classes by

structuring special awards programs that give equal opportunities to both handicapped and non-handicapped children, and teams comprised of both groups.

Conferees recommended that successful interaction programs be collected and developed into training programs that would help teachers learn specific strategies for influencing the attitudes of non-handicapped children.

Breaking Barriers

Participants identified several problem areas which tend to thwart the process of attitudinal change. Some are the result of routine administrative practices which unintentionally bar handicapped children from beneficial activities. For instance, in some states students cannot participate in interscholastic sports unless they pass three subjects. This is a reasonable yardstick for non-handicapped students, but one that imposes near impossible restrictions on many handicapped children. It should be possible to restructure this practice to allow handicapped students to participate in such activities.

A related problem involves the scheduling of transportation for handicapped students. In many areas of the country, schools run late buses to accommodate children engaged in interscholastic events and other after-school activities. Buses for special education students, however, ordinarily operate on a more rigid schedule. More often than not, handicapped children have little opportunity to be on hand for special events.

Barriers of this nature should receive the special attention of teachers, administrators, parents and others engaged in helping the handicapped. **Social** interaction between handicapped and non-handicapped children is every bit as important as educational integration. Buses can be rescheduled, and non-handicapped students and other volunteers can help arrange personal transportation for special events. Handicapped students **need** to be a part of the normal school day. Their participation is both personally beneficial and vital to the progress of attitudinal change in their non-handicapped peers.

Plain Talk With Children

Teachers understand the importance of honesty in the classroom. They know that even the youngest children are generally keenly aware of patronizing or demeaning attitudes in their elders. They know if their teacher likes them or dislikes them. They know the difference between approval and disapproval, flattery and genuine praise. As one teacher put it:

"If you want to con a third grader, you'd better be darn good at it — you could wind up on the other end of the stick . . . ." Experienced teachers have a simple method of finding out how their pupils feel about something: They ask. "Children will tell you how they react to someone in the class who is different," stated one teacher. "They have very real opinions about a child in a wheelchair, or one who can't talk, or a kid who is mentally retarded . . . ."

The teacher who has established a good relationship with her pupils has a ready source of information. She also has the experience to know just how much the child is revealing — and, sometimes, what the things he isn't saying really mean.

Teachers advise privacy in such relationships. They say that a child will impart a great deal more "honest" information on a one-to-one basis. Peer pressure often affects a child's answers. No one likes to appear different in front of his friends, and individuals tend to take on the protective coloration of unanimity when questioned in a group.

Since children generally respond to honesty with honest emotions, teachers should give them opportunities to develop their feelings toward positive interaction with others. Class discussions and role playing can be useful in promoting understanding. Let a non-handicapped student take the part of a handicapped peer. How does he deal with this disability? What does he think about being a handicapped person? How does he feel about other people — and how does he think they feel about him? Once students discover their own feelings in this area, they have taken the first step toward understanding such feelings in others.

Simulations and psychodramas are useful learning tools. However, like all such tools, their value is in direct proportion to the expertise of the person who uses them. The application of these instructional aids should be included in the special training projects developed for helping regular classroom teachers.

The Media

Participants in work group sessions on changing attitudes among school personnel, non-handicapped children and the general public all felt that serious attention should be focused on the use — and misuse — of the media. Following are some specific suggestions pertinent to this particular section:

- To change the attitudes of non-handicapped children toward their peers, look to the books, motion pictures and television programs that children enjoy. Particular emphasis should be placed on television, due to its strong influence on young children. Programs such as "Little House on the Prairie," "The Waltons," and "Eight is Enough" were noted as

presentations dealing specifically with social interaction among families. It was felt that positive characterizations of handicapped children in series such as these could greatly influence the attitudes of young viewers. Conferees did not limit their suggestions to such programs, but believed that their formats often dealt with "reasonably plausible situations" — at least, in relation to many other alternatives. Conferees noted that it would be most helpful if the writers, producers, and sponsors of TV shows — and the networks themselves — could be influenced to present handicapped persons in "true-to-life" situations. It was also recommended that programs such as "Mister Rogers," "Captain Kangaroo," and other such programs specifically aimed at the younger market be asked to include handicapped children within their formats.

- Conferees suggested that school textbooks could be improved to more accurately portray the presence of handicapped children in society. Adults or children with any sort of disability are, for the most part, invisible in school textbooks. Conferees referred to a Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) position paper currently being drafted concerning recommended criteria for textbook publication.
- It was suggested that the Association for Retarded Citizens and the CEC join with various other interested organizations to develop standards for a "seal of approval" that would be granted to media presentations portraying handicapped persons in a realistic manner.

III. Attitudes in the Community

Efforts to create positive attitudes among non-handicapped students can be greatly enhanced if this goal is accepted and reinforced outside the school setting. Interests in this work group session focused on steps the school system might take in obtaining community support. Conference participants considered the problem in terms of a broad range of possibilities, including the public media, families, religious groups, civic and voluntary organizations, and other appropriate areas.

Changing public attitudes toward handicapped persons was perhaps the most challenging problem addressed by conference participants. Merely **defining** the audience itself is a near impossible task. Terms such as "public," "community" and "society" are ambiguous at best. We are faced with the fact that there are nearly as many publics as there are people.

Further, each individual sees the handicapped person from a very subjective point of view. His opinions are formed by differing degrees of knowledge, interest and personal emotions. He sees different disabilities in a different light, and has strong positive or negative feelings colored by his involvement with handicapped persons — or the lack of such involvement.

If there is a commonality among the various publics, it very likely rests in a shared sense of confusion and misunderstanding. As noted earlier, the public in general is plagued with an alarming amount of **mis**information. Data presented on the lack of knowledge concerning mental retardation can, to a large degree, be matched by negative findings regarding other handicapping conditions.

Conferees were clearly aware of the fact that the blame for such misunderstanding cannot be laid entirely at the public's door. The advertis-

ing and public relations industries have taught us that the public **will** respond to strong, repeated appeals to purchase products . . . accept or reject individuals, groups or ideas . . . and take affirmative or negative action for a nearly infinite number of reasons. In other words, the technologies and techniques do exist for establishing and reinforcing a particular message.

If the public is not entirely responsible for its conclusions regarding the handicapped, then who is? A great many private and public agencies have done a credible job of disseminating information about the handicapped, particularly in light of the fact that no single agency has at its disposal the staggering amount of dollars it takes to launch **one seasonal campaign** to sell automobiles and detergent. Certainly, the efforts of these agencies have not been wasted. Today's public is a somewhat better informed public than its counterpart of twenty years ago. But it is nowhere near as knowledgeable as it should be — or as it could be.

Participants pointed to several factors which stand in the way of properly informing the public:

(1) As mentioned, **lack of funding** to saturate the market.

(2) **Fragmentation of interests:** The public is assailed with information concerning an overwhelming variety of handicapping conditions. Agencies continually compete with each other, vying for public attention.

(3) **The nature of the message:** In plain language, handicapped persons are not "appealing" to some members of the public. It is relatively easy to invoke sympathy, pity and sorrow on the part of the handicapped. Unfortunately, such emotions are often accompanied by negative feelings ranging from dislike to revulsion. We have learned that neither pity, sorrow nor sympathy lead to understanding, action or involvement.

We are beginning to learn, then, that the image we project to the public **can** mask a negative backlash inherent in the image itself. Our message does not always affirm handicapped persons as real people with varying degrees of disability. Sometimes, it sets them apart from the rest of humanity.

Conference participants felt that it was time to take a new, more incisive look at the problem of public attitudes. Perhaps the very problem of a fragmented public could lead to some productive solutions: If there are many publics, it might be wise to face the problem of changing attitudes of both general and specific segments of society. Perhaps we could take a lesson from the advertising world and tailor our messages to fit the needs of particular audiences. Narrowing these specific publics still further leads to a group worthy of immediate consideration. Conferees identified these individuals as physicians, lawyers, judges, law enforcement officials,

truant officers, parents of both handicapped and non-handicapped persons, parent-teacher association members, area employers, recreational groups, unions, advocacy groups, governmental officials, social service organizations, volunteer groups, service clubs, political organizations, media personnel, opinion leaders, teachers, school administrators and school boards. A favorable impact upon the attitudes of these particular persons would narrow the scope of the problem, and reap immediate benefits.

Participants further identified several specific strategies for reaching some of these basic community targets:

Medical personnel

Physicians are often the primary sources of information for parents of handicapped children. Many parents wholly depend upon their family doctors for decisions that may affect the lives of their children. How do physicians feel about the placement of handicapped children in public schools? Does a knowledge of the patient's physical condition necessarily imply an understanding of his social needs, or his ability to function in the classroom? Conferees felt public information efforts should be launched to alert community medical personnel to the non-medical needs of handicapped children. Efforts could include the preparation and dissemination of training materials designed to give an overview of the importance of mainstreaming, seminars designed specifically for physicians, and the recruitment of physicians as advisors and professional advocates. Further, it was suggested that physicians would gain a better understanding of the non-medical needs of their patients if pertinent information were included in their initial medical training. If such training became a part of the curriculum, medical school examinations would reflect the importance of such knowledge.

In addition to the biological and physical aspects of mental retardation and other handicapping conditions, both training and examinations should focus on community services for the handicapped, and the physician's role in working with such groups.

Moreover, curriculum changes in the training programs of social workers, psychologists and other non-medical professionals who deal with the handicapped would enhance the knowledge of such personnel and influence their licensing criteria.

Judicial personnel

Participants felt there was a vital need to influence the attitudes of varied members of the legal profession. They pointed out that in a great many areas attorneys and judges control the fate of special education

classes in the public schools through court litigation. It was suggested that special informational programs on handicapped persons should be designed for presentation to legal professionals. It was further recommended that the Association for Retarded Citizens and other such organizations work with appropriate legal action groups to develop strategies that could focus on selected court cases involving handicapped persons. Representatives from such groups would join professionals involved with the handicapped to study cases in progress to help determine the most desirable goals for the handicapped clients concerned. Information would then be forwarded to attorneys handling the individual cases. It was felt that such counsel, based partially on data from similar cases in a number of different areas, could provide valuable help to practicing attorneys.

Additionally, conferees suggested that cooperative efforts between attorneys and professionals who work with the handicapped could lead to the establishment of a clearinghouse for expert witnesses. They pointed out that many cases involving the handicapped are lost through the inability of so-called "expert" witnesses who have no real understanding of the needs of the individuals concerned.

Parents, schools and the community

How can parents, teachers and school administrators work together to enhance positive community attitudes toward handicapped persons? As noted in the previous section, parents, teachers and school administrators still have a long way to go toward fully understanding their **own** roles in the mainstreaming of handicapped students. If these groups cannot always define their individual feelings concerning the needs of the handicapped, how can they hope to change attitudes in the community?

Conferees did not view this problem as a barrier in the path of community understanding. Instead, they felt that positive interaction between parents, teachers and school administrators could lead to a healthy exchange of ideas that would ultimately bring these persons together, and strengthen their overall efforts. The cooperative approach to problem solving recommended for students can serve equally well for the parents, teachers and administrators of those students. Extending the analogy, people who learn together tend to trust, and depend upon, those persons who are members of their team. A good working relationship is based on mutual respect. Since parents are sometimes intimidated by teachers and administrators, it was suggested that a "neutral" meeting ground be established away from the school itself. Such a setting would help parents and teachers establish themselves in a peer relationship as colleagues working toward a common goal.

Parents, teachers and school administrators who are gaining insight into their own attitudes can pass their knowledge along to others. They can help disavow some of the myths and misconceptions about handicapped persons by relating their own learning experiences. Parents, for instance, can find common ground with other parents, and help them understand the concept of mainstreaming. Many parents view the idea of a "least restrictive environment" as a hazard rather than a solution. Efforts should be made to identify parents of handicapped children, and make sure they are aware of the real meaning of integrative learning, and the choices offered through placement in public schools — the "alternatives within the alternative" — such as recreational and social activities.

Experienced teachers are in a good position to educate and inform other teachers. Mainstreaming is new to some, and many teachers are unfamiliar with the needs of handicapped children. Special education teachers can be valuable resources for their regular classroom peers.

Conferees identified a number of specific actions parents and school personnel could utilize to change attitudes within the community:

- Often, the public school system is not equipped to provide the most appropriate educational path for handicapped children. Parents and school personnel should work together to design checklists that give a clear picture of the capabilities — and needs — of individual area schools. Such a list would help, and encourage, schools to upgrade their programs. In turn, parents of both handicapped and non-handicapped children would gain a better understanding of the changes required to serve their children.

  Spending money — and especially tax money — quickly gains public attention. Figures that show the potential tax bite for a community that **doesn't** integrate its educational system can have a telling effect on citizens who have to come up with the cash.

  While participants advocated the use of sound economic reasoning to change public attitudes, they suggested that such strategies be used with caution and restraint. Many people are unhappy with the past and present programs that have funded mentally retarded persons and other handicapped individuals in the community. Some feel that **any** such support is non-productive — that federal money is wasted on the handicapped population. More than once, various groups and individuals have used economics to create a community backlash, and turned the public against services for the handicapped. Advocates who use economics should first gain a clear picture of those economics themselves.

- Conference participants felt there were occasions when advocates of mainstreaming need to take a firm position in their relations with local

school systems. It was recommended that parents and other volunteers take part in such encounters, rather than teachers. Teachers should not be asked to put themselves in adversary positions with their employers.

- Advocates of the handicapped should make every effort to put themselves in decision-making positions. School board members, for instance, are in a position to influence budgets, curricula, teaching practices and other areas that can affect the handicapped.

- Volunteer "special advisor" programs should be designed to assure the presence of advocates of the handicapped on school boards that do not include members either knowledgeable or sympathetic to the educational needs of handicapped persons.

- Programs should be designed to train teachers, school board members and administrators in the legal and civil rights of handicapped individuals.

- Teenage students and young people from church groups could be mobilized to conduct door-to-door campaigns to alert community citizens to the educational needs of handicapped children. This strategy would be especially useful in conjunction with upcoming school board decisions, rallies and media campaigns.

The Various Publics

As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to accurately catalog the many different publics within the community. To simplify the task of preparing recommendations for changing public attitudes, conference participants divided the population into the specific "close to the scene" target groups covered above, and the public in general. While this second audience includes a wide range of educational, sociological and economic groups, the strategies suggested below are broad enough in scope to reach nearly all members of the community, in one way or another.

The Medium and the Message

How can we effectively reach the public? How much do the citizens of the community really want to know about the handicapped? How can we turn firmly established prejudices into an understanding of the needs of handicapped children?

As noted at the beginning of this section, reaching the public is one thing — getting their interest and attention is another. In many respects, we have failed to state our case effectively. To face the facts squarely: People don't **like** to think about unpleasant illnesses, and mental and physical disabilities. The presence of such "imperfections" in others reminds them of their own vulnerability.

Logically, the idea that "this could happen to you or a member of your family" should stir individuals to action. Apparently, it doesn't work that way. If members of the general public **wanted** to think about these conditions, where would they start? There are simply too many potential hazards to consider.

Instead of exhorting people to **do** something, perhaps we should concentrate at least a part of our efforts on getting them to **feel** something. In the words of the advertising industry: "If you want the customer to buy the product, the first thing you've got to do is get him to **like** it . . . ."

It is safe to say that the public in general often feels threatened by the handicapped. Mentally and physically impaired people are different. Different people are threatening. In a world where many people find it hard to trust their next door neighbors who are the same race, creed and color, the handicapped person is unlikely to get invited in for coffee.

The issue of mainstreaming presents an ideal opportunity for the concept of "learning to like the product." Participants suggested that media campaigns stressing the "normality" of handicapped persons might go a long way toward changing public attitudes. We have discussed the portrayal of handicapped persons in the media, and seen that more often than not they appear as "caricatures of humanity" — the image of a particular disability, rather than a real person who happens to have that disability. Changing that image won't be easy — an alarming percentage of the population receives the **majority of its information on all subjects from one source:** television. Even people who actively seek other sources are susceptible. And certainly, this medium makes an awesome contribution to our primary concern in this document: the attitudes of non-handicapped children.

Clearly, television is not solely responsible for creating false images about the handicapped. There is a great deal of questionable material everywhere — even in teacher-training materials and school textbooks.

In all fairness, the media does not always persecute the handicapped. There have been notable successes in this area, and those persons and organizations responsible for such presentations are to be congratulated. Unfortunately, positive images of the handicapped are still few and far between. There are not enough "good" things happening to change the public attitude.

What **can** be done to alleviate this situation? How can we influence the media to help? Conference participants offered several suggestions:

- Picture handicapped persons in depth. Establish them as well-rounded characters living lives similar to other persons in the presentation. Do **not** portray handicapped persons as any more devious, pathetic, sexually over-active, emotionally unstable or prone toward criminality than other members of the general population. Conversely, it is equally unrealistic to portray these individuals as possessing overly virtuous, "saintlike" characteristics.

- Show the world through the eyes of the handicapped. Too often, such individuals are portrayed only as objects acted upon or viewed by other people. Handicapped persons initiate as well as respond.

- Many presentations would have us believe that handicapped persons neither laugh nor cry, that their disabilities exempt them from emotions. Such portrayals set handicapped persons apart, as a "different" kind of being.

- Audio-visual productions, special education-oriented motion pictures and the printed media frequently fall short of the standards of quality common to the commercial marketplace. Thus, audiences tend to equate the value of handicapped persons with the production values of the media. (The medium **is** truly the message.)

- Handicapped individuals and their advocates comprise an untapped lobbying potential. The media and its commercial sponsors respond to public pressure —but they measure that pressure in **numbers.** Participants urged the development of a major lobbying force aimed at changing media attitudes.

- It was suggested that members of the music world such as country-western performers should be encouraged to write songs which accentuate the human qualities of handicapped persons.

- Comic books are widely read by children. Realistic portrayals of the handicapped in these publications would enhance positive attitudes in young persons.

Gaining Public Response

To reach the public, then, we must allay the public's fears — through the media, through personal contact and through a wide variety of organizational thrusts within the community. We cannot hide an individual's handicap — but we can make every effort to put it in its proper place. John

is a **man** who happens to have the condition of blindness. Mary is a **woman** who leads an active, productive life, and sits in a wheelchair. Mentally retarded persons should be pictured as real people who live and work in the community, and learn slower than some of their peers. We must show handicapped people doing what the general public does: Going to the store, the disco or the ballgame. Working at a desk or on an assembly line.

Labeling has obstructed the cause of the handicapped. Such words as "severe" and "profound" do little more than confuse the public and reinforce negative attitudes. People who have "severe" and "profound" conditions do not conjure up desirable images. It may be that we have tried to tell the public too much — there is strong evidence that we **have** told them more than they want to know. If we follow the premise that our wisest course is to first convince the public to **like** handicapped persons, then we must concentrate on images that suggest likeable qualities. Thus, participants noted that terms such as "multiply handicapped," "severely or profoundly retarded," "least restrictive environment" and "mainstreaming" suggest negative concepts in the public eye. Teaching the public terminology is not the goal — particularly terminology that is unfamiliar, and possibly threatening to the general population.

Conferees felt there were at least two distinct groups within the general public: those who have little or no interest in learning about the handicapped, and those who **are** interested, and want additional information. The first group **can** be reached through the media — if adequate funding is made available. Locally, they can be influenced through specific campaigns highlighting the "everyday lifestyles" they share with handicapped persons. The second group can be reached through somewhat easier avenues, such as seminars, classes, speakers' bureaus, public radio and TV presentations by parents of handicapped persons, and handicapped persons themselves.

Participants posed questions about physically and mentally handicapped persons the public finds "less than attractive." Should an effort be made to present these individuals in a favorable light? Should they be exposed in the media? Viewing the problem from a strictly practical standpoint, it was felt that it would be wise to avoid forcing the "hard, cold facts" of severe disabilities on the public. Perhaps it would be more honest to do so — but it would very likely have negative results. If the public finds it hard to relate to people in wheelchairs, or people who are blind or mildly retarded, they are not ready to change their attitudes toward the more "visible" handicaps. In an effort to further the understanding of the overall handicapped population, it seems a small hypocrisy to avoid giving the public more than it can handle. Humanitarian appeals — "doing the right thing" — have failed to do the job. If we can convince the public that handicapped people make "good neighbors, good friends and good citizens," we will have taken an enormous step forward.

Certainly, these specialized programs should have some "spillover" effects on that segment of the population not overly interested in learning about the handicapped.

. . . . . .

Conference participants identified several additional strategies for changing public attitudes. They included reversing property owners' attitudes toward the handicapped . . . supporting the needs of people who work with the handicapped . . . and utilizing the family concept to gain understanding . . . .

- Take advantage of the signs of change in society relative to the definition of "productivity." For example: Retirement is no longer the end of the line for senior citizens. Such persons have valuable "life experience" to offer, and could serve as excellent advocates for handicapped persons. There are many programs across the country already utilizing volunteer advocates in the schools.

- Take a good look at the needs and attitudes of persons working for the handicapped in direct service positions. Apparently, both training programs and pay structures of such personnel foster negative attitudes toward the handicapped. There seem to be significant problems in the pay scales of persons working with the mentally retarded.

- Efforts should be made to change public attitudes toward the dignity of handicapped persons. There is a tendency to call handicapped people of all ages by their first names. Additionally, such persons are often spoken of in the third person, within their presence. The assumption here is that a handicapped person is less than human, and does not have a complete identity.

- Advocates of the handicapped should link their efforts with other social action groups that have similar goals. Support should be elicited from women's rights organizations, civil rights groups, and others.

- Conferees felt the Phoenix Conference work group structure, utilizing "think-tank" procedures, could be effective on local levels. The format is well suited to gathering individuals from various decision-making elements of the community. Cooperative problem-solving sessions bring divergent, or conflicting, concepts to light for discussion. Such meetings could form the beginning of a united action group dedicated to changing public attitudes.

- Local advocates should capitalize on the growing trend toward strengthening the family concept. Public relations thrusts such as "Let's go back to the neighborhood," "Let's all take care of each other," and "We're better off if we all stick together" could serve as ideal platforms for fostering the social, economic and educational rights of the handicapped.

- Where feasible, handicapped persons can help their cause by becoming actively engaged in community civic activities and organizations.

- The previous strategy gives advocacy groups the opportunity to "showcase" handicapped persons with special talents or abilities comparable to those of their non-handicapped peers. The public is frequently unaware of the fact that there are talented and successful people among the handicapped population. Public notice of such persons attacks the misconception that a person's "worth" is directly related to his physical condition or I.Q.

- Advocates of the handicapped should encourage changes in federal regulations that act as disincentives to the absorption of mentally retarded persons into the mainstream of society. Particular emphasis should be placed on those disincentives stemming from SSI payments, and federal regulations which include the labeling of mentally retarded persons as a qualification for federal dollars.

- Advocates should make every effort to evaluate the effects of planned strategies before launching attitude-changing campaigns. Consider the alternatives. For example: Instead of directly confronting the community with a campaign to change zoning laws to accommodate large groups of handicapped persons, consider smaller group homes that could be assimilated into the community as "new good neighbors." This strategy could serve to increase property values, and act as a starting point for interaction between handicapped persons and their non-handicapped neighbors.

Conference Goals

Participants at the Phoenix Conference were well aware of the magnitude of the problem of changing attitudes toward handicapped persons. They realized that concerns in this area transcend parents, teachers, students and the educational system. Clearly, the basic problem of attitudinal change deals with the fabric of society itself, and some of its fundamental values. Fear, prejudice and public apathy cannot be attacked on a single front. Nor can any one agency or organization tackle the job. Only a concerted effort on the part of all persons concerned with the rights of handicapped persons can hope to accomplish this goal.

At the closing session of the meeting, participants called for a "major thrust aimed at gaining influential allies in the cause of the handicapped." In this respect, it was felt that the cooperation of the various media was essential in furthering understanding of handicapped persons as "first class members of society." It was suggested that representatives from the television, publishing and motion picture industries in particular be asked to participate in future discussions on this issue.

"No matter how hard we try to reach the public," noted one participant, "our efforts will mean little unless we reach the decision-makers and opinion-molders from the local to the national level. The problem is simply too big to handle effectively on a smaller basis . . . ." This comment did not negate the group's feelings on the importance of continuing campaigns to influence attitudinal change on a day-to-day, one-to-one basis among parents, teachers and non-handicapped children. It **did** serve to underscore the need to involve media, governmental and educational personnel as active, positive supporters of handicapped persons.

"There has never been a time in our history when there was more technology available for changing or forming public attitudes," noted Dr. Philip Roos. "We must enlist and use that technology to achieve our goals . . . ."

Roster of Participants

Dr. Jack W. Birch
Professor
School of Education
University of Pittsburgh
4625 Fifth Avenue, Apt. 206
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 624-1250

Dr. Alan J. Brightman
Director
Workshop on Children's Awareness
36 Valentine Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 661-7652

Mr. Dale C. Critz
President
Critz Organization
Post Office Box 22999
Savannah, GA 31403
(912) 354-7000

Mrs. Whitty Cuninggim
Board of Directors
National School Volunteer Program
735 Pine Valley Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27106
(919) 725-1483

Ms. Carol Murphy
Program Representative
United Cerebral Palsy
2400 E. Devon, Suite 170
Des Plaines, IL 60018
(312) 297-6770

Ms. Barbara Gordon
American Federation of Teachers
902 Landmark One
Cherry Hill, NJ 08034
(609) 795-1298

Dr. Samuel Guskin
Professor
Department of Special Education
Indiana University
2805 East Tenth Street
Bloomington, IN 47041
(812) 337-0423

Dr. David W. Johnson
Professor of Educational Psychology
330 Burton Hall
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 373-5829

Dr. Roger Johnson
Associate Professor of
Education
Department of
Curriculum and Instruction
202 Pattee Hall
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 373-5829

Judge Jean Lewis
910 SW Westwood Drive
Portland, OR 97201
(503) 244-4751

Dr. Horace Mann
Professor
Exceptional Children Division
State University College
1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222
(716) 878-4334

Dr. Lee Martin
Director
Metropolitan Learning and
Mental Health Clinic
24424 W. McNichols
Detroit, MI 48219
(313) 533-0550

Mr. James Metzdorf
Coordinator of Staff Development
Jefferson County Public Schools
1209 Quail
Lakewood, CO 80215
(303) 231-2391

Mrs. Catherine Neman
Special Projects Coordinator
On-the-Job Training Project
Association for Retarded Citizens
2709 Avenue E East
Arlington, TX 76011
(817) 261-4961

Dr. Ann Nevin
Associate Professor
Department of Special Education
Waterman Building
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 656-2936

Dr. James S. Payne
Associate Professor of Education
Ruffner Hall — Room 120
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA 22901
(804) 924-7461

Dr. Stephen Richardson
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Department of Pediatrics
1300 Morris Park Avenue
Bronx, NY 10461
(212) 430-3080

Dr. Philip Roos
National Executive Director
Association for Retarded Citizens
2709 Avenue E East
Arlington, TX 76011
(817) 261-4961

Ms. Bea Rufer
75 Whitehouse Drive
Rochester, NY 14616
(716) 865-3663

Project Personnel

Mr. Neal Barrett, Jr.
3970 Sherwood Forest Drive
#141 East
Dallas, TX 75220
(214) 351-5577

Dr. Brian M. McCann
Director
ARC National Research
and Demonstration Institute
2709 Avenue E East
Arlington, TX 76011
(817) 261-4961

Ms. Liz Pippin
ARC National Research
and Demonstration Institute
2709 Avenue E East
Arlington, TX 76011
(817) 261-4961

Ms. Joyce Sherman
ARC National Research
and Demonstration Institute
2709 Avenue E East
Arlington, TX 76011
(817) 261-4961